

**RANDY STEIDL TESTIMONY**

Good morning. My name is Randy Steidl. I was wrongfully convicted and sentenced to death in 1987 for a double murder that I did not commit. I was the 18th death-row inmate to be exonerated in the state of Illinois.

My case reeked of prosecutorial and police misconduct, fabricated evidence, lies by a jailhouse snitch, and a \$25,000 dollar reward from the actual contract killer.

How does one combat this type of "justice" system with an ineffective attorney who had never handled a capital case? I went from the comfort of my home and children to death row in 97 days.

And I'm just one of 130 exonerated former death-row inmates struggling to regain what is left of our lives. How many were not as fortunate? How many innocent human beings have had their voices silenced forever by the executioner's needle? How many of the approximately 3,300 people on America's death rows are as innocent of the crimes for which they were convicted as I was?

I did 12 years on death row and received two execution dates. But as harsh as death row was, I found being 47 years old and having my sentenced reduced to life without parole to be far harsher. After so many mistakes in capital cases throughout this country, how can any state justify having the death penalty? If the system was free of human error and human corruption and could guarantee that it was 100 percent accurate, perhaps it could be argued that the death penalty is acceptable. But it is neither.

Meanwhile, the cost of the death penalty is staggering, in economic terms as well as human ones. The state of Illinois did a cost study in 1992, and it found that the average time from conviction to execution was 12 years and cost the state \$3.5 million for each case. This is money that could be better served by establishing funds to support victims' families, rather than being a "stimulus package" for defense attorneys and prosecutors.

The study also found the cost of a sentence of life without parole to be \$500,000. Police and prosecutors, defense attorneys, witnesses, judges and juries are not infallible. Mistakes are made, innocent people are convicted, and terminal injustice is perpetrated. If God was the prosecutor judge and jury, maybe the death penalty would be defensible. The taking of an innocent person's life either by an individual or the state cannot be undone. An innocent man can be released from prison. He cannot be released from the grave.

## **RANDY STEIDL CASE CHRONOLOGY**

**July 6, 1986:** Firemen find the bodies of Karen and Dyke Rhoads in their burning home in Paris, Illinois.

**September 21, 1986:** Darrell Harrington, an alcoholic with two convictions for writing bad checks, accuses Gordon R. (Randy) Steidl and Herbert R. Whitlock of the murders.

**February 16, 1987:** Deborah Reinbolt, an alcoholic and drug addict, tells police she was present when Gordon R. (Randy) Steidl and Herbert R. Whitlock committed the murders; she gives police a knife with a 5-inch blade, purportedly the murder weapon.

**February 19, 1987:** Paris police arrest Steidl and Whitlock.

**March 10, 1987:** Edgar County grand jury returns indictments charging Steidl and Whitlock with both murders.

**May 22, 1987:** Jury finds Whitlock guilty of the murder of Karen Rhoads, but acquits him of the murder of Dyke Rhoads. He is sentenced to life in prison.

**July 1987:** Jury finds Steidl guilty of both murders.

**August 12, 1987:** Steidl is sentenced to death.

**September 28, 1988:** Fourth District Illinois Appellate Court affirms Whitlock's conviction and sentence. *People v. Whitlock*, 174 Ill. App. 3d 749 (1988).

**November 21, 1988:** Harrington recants his trial testimony in a statement before a court reporter.

**January 13, 1989:** Reinbolt recants her trial testimony in a signed affidavit.

**December 1989:** Reinbolt and Harrington recant their recantations at a hearing before Judge Komada.

**January 24, 1991:** Illinois Supreme Court affirms Steidl's conviction and death sentence. *People v. Steidl*, 142 Ill. 2d 204 (1991).

**October 25, 1995:** Without an evidentiary hearing, Judge Komada denies Steidl's petition for post-conviction relief.

**February 17-18, 1996:** Reinbolt recants her trial testimony for the second time in a four-hour, videotaped statement.

**February 23, 1996:** Reinbolt retracts her second recantation in an audiotaped statement to the Edgar County State's Attorney.

**December 11, 1996:** On appeal of the denial of Steidl's post-conviction petition, the Illinois Supreme Court denies Steidl's request for a new trial but grants a new sentencing hearing on the grounds that his attorney provided ineffective assistance at the sentencing phase of the trial by failing to present evidence in mitigation.

**February 18, 1999:** Steidl is resentenced to life in prison after prosecutors agree not to pursue the death penalty.

**December 5, 2000:** Fourth District Appellate Court denies Steidl a new trial.

**April 4, 2001:** Illinois Supreme Court denies the Petition for Leave to Appeal.

**June 17, 2003:** Judge Michael P. McCuskey, of the U.S. District Court for the Central District of Illinois, orders a new trial for Steidl. *Steidl v. Walls*, 267 F. Supp. 2d 919 (2003).

**March 25, 2004:** After an intensive review of the case, Attorney General Lisa Madigan declines to appeal McCuskey's decision.

**May 28, 2004:** All charges against Steidl are dropped and hours later he is released from the Danville Correctional Center.

**January 8, 2008:** All charges against Steidl's codefendant Herb Whitlock are dropped and he is released from an Illinois prison.